



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

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• 5730

18 AUG 1976

• Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator
John F. Kennedy Federal Building
Government Center
Boston, Massachusetts 02203

Dear Senator Kennedy:

This is in further response to your inquiry of 23 July 1976 regarding correspondence from Mr. Paul A. Coonan concerning the disappearance of his daughter.

A thorough review of all aspects of the case to which Mr. Coonan refers has been made, and no evidence has been developed which might support a cause for the tragedy other than the perils of the sea. The boat was located by a fish spotter aircraft six miles offshore in Cape Cod Bay at 5:30 AM on 30 May 1976. The boat was capsized and floating stern down at about a 60 degree angle with the bow just breaking the surface. When lifted aboard the fishing vessel KINGFISHER, the outboard motor was found to be tilted to the inboard position, the motor's gear lever was in the neutral position and the ignition and lighting switches were in the off position. The outboard motor's portable gas tank was seen floating nearby but was not recovered. The fuel line was torn at the tank fitting, probably as a result of the capsizing of the boat, and the force developed when the partially full tank floated free. Two personal flotation devices of the approved life jacket type were found in the boat along with three non approved "ski-belt" flotation devices. The life jackets were found to be rotted and unserviceable due to improper storage. Some personal effects of the missing occupants were recovered including a woman's pocketbook, believed to belong to Ms. Elaine Kwiatkowski which, among other things, contained a packet of marijuana. Several baited fishing lines were attached to the boat and one signal flare was also found aboard the craft.

Five helicopter search sorties totaling 13.7 hours were flown and six surface craft searched a total of 27.9 hours after the discovery of the partially sunken craft on 30 and 31 May 1976 without success. Weather conditions on Saturday, 29 May 1976, are recorded to have been overcast, visibility five nautical miles, winds southwest 15 to 25 knots and seas 2 to 3 feet. On the following day the sky remained overcast, visibility five nautical miles, winds south southeast at 5 to 10 knots and the seas were calm.

13 AUG 1976

Subj: Reply to Senator Kennedy's inquiry of 23 July 1976 regarding correspondence from Mr. Coonan concerning the disappearance of his daughter

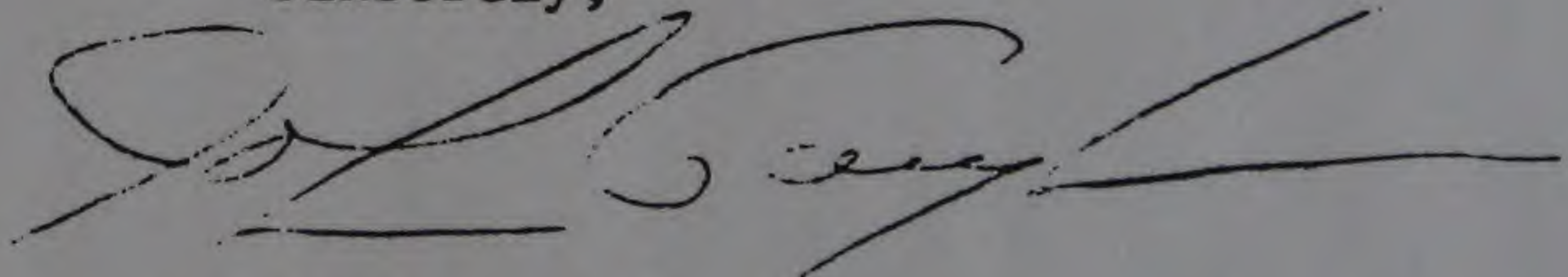
Sea water temperature on both days was 54 degrees, and calculated life expectancy for an unprotected person immersed at that temperature is 99 percent lethal within 4.3 hours.

Mr. Coonan's contention that a foreign vessel may have recovered the four young people and taken them incommunicado to a foreign country is not viable for two reasons; first, because Cape Cod Bay is a closed body of water within the internal waters of the United States and thus not open to foreign vessels for fishing or other commerce; and second, because historically foreign vessels of all nations operating off of both coasts of this country have participated in many search and rescue incidents over the years which have involved U.S. citizens, and have never hesitated to come to the aid of a distressed mariner or to contact the U.S. Coast Guard. Nothing in the observed and reported condition of the boat, boat equipment or personal belongings recovered supports an allegation of either foul play or abduction.

It is known that the operator, Mr. Daniel R. Kwiatkowski, had just recently placed the boat involved back in service after a two year layup and that the accident occurred on the boat's second trip to sea. On the first trip the operator became lost, ran aground and damaged the outboard engine's propeller. Mr. Kwiatkowski, according to a person who accompanied him on the first trip, demonstrated a lack of knowledge and skill in boat operation. Although it is only speculation based upon the barest of evidence, it is probable that the boat sustained some form of mechanical difficulty and that it was swamped over the stern while one or more persons attempted to work on the raised motor. The weight of the engine would quickly capsize the boat and sink it until only its bow was out of the water, in the attitude in which it was found. The motion of the sea and the temperature of the water would make it unlikely that a person could retrieve a personal flotation device from under the capsized hull or maintain a hold on the portion of the hull that remained on or near the surface.

It is hoped that the above information will be useful to you. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call upon us again.

Sincerely,



JOHN GAUGHAN
Liaison Officer, U. S. Coast Guard
By direction of the Commandant